

India and Japan in the 21st Century: Ambassador's Address at the International Christian University on 2 May, 2007

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Prof. Norihiko Suzuki, President of International Christian University;
Prof. Emeritus Kōichi Niitsu;
Prof. Mitsuo Morimoto, Vice President;
Prof. Marion William Steele, Dean;
Prof. Kenneth R. Robinson, Director, Institute of Asian Cultural Studies;
Ambassador Eijirō Noda, Former Ambassador of Japan to India;
Faculty members of ICU; and
Dear students

I am honoured to be in the midst of such a distinguished gathering of scholars this morning. I am grateful to all of you—the Management, the Faculty and the students of this prestigious institution—for giving me this opportunity to share with you some thoughts on India-Japan Relations in the 21st century.

To celebrate our past association and to nurture deeper contemporary understanding of each other, particularly among the younger generation, 2007 is being observed as the India-Japan Friendship Year. Reciprocal Festivals are underway in both Japan and India. Academic and scholarly interactions between our two knowledge-based societies must become a solid pillar of our relations during the 21st century. In fact, our meeting today is a very important part of this process.

2007 marks 50 years of the establishment of educational and cultural ties between India and Japan, which must be raised to qualitatively higher levels in coming years. Several Indian and Japanese educational institutions, but especially ICU, have regularly invited exchange professors to lecture in the arts, humanities and sciences in our respective countries. This has strengthened the bonds of friendship and aroused scholarly interest in each other's societies. Two early and pioneering examples have been India's poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore and Japan's Okakura Tenshin.

This exchange must be further reinforced at the professorial level, for which new institutional frameworks need to be established, such as a Chair on Indian Studies at ICU and a corresponding Chair in Japanese studies at an Indian university. Such arrangements can play a vital role in carrying forward the enlightened socio-political-economic thought of Tagore, Okakura and others whose visionary contributions gave rise to our friendship.

I am happy to note that in recent years, ICU has also taken the lead in promoting

student exchanges between India and Japan. These must be significantly increased, especially given the need for greater proficiency in Japanese and in Indian languages, as a prelude to expanded intellectual and scholarly inquiry. In fact, I would venture to suggest that students must become the life-blood of people to people relations between our two nations.

It is important for the growing and vibrant relationship between India and Japan to focus anew on the present and plan ahead for the future, while also drawing inspiration from the past. It is quite remarkable that throughout the various phases of history since historical and civilisational contacts between India and Japan began some 1,400 years ago, our two countries have never been adversaries. Our enduring ties have never been battered by the shadow of wars, nor buffeted by the long years of the Cold War, and have certainly never been challenged by any major conflict of interest or dispute. The close affinities between our two peoples have been an unchanging factor and have benefited greatly from the work of our preceding generations, particularly since the beginning of the last century. A recent survey in my country re-established once again that for Indians, Japan and the Japanese people continue to remain most highly favoured and respected.

However, it also remains a fact that the intensity of interactions between our two nations in the political, economic and social fields has remained rather modest for almost the entire period of our historic association, and it is only now that we are consciously trying to remedy that rather glaring shortcoming. What we have been witnessing since former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's historic visit to India in August, 2000 is a dramatic transformation in our bilateral relations.

It is, as it were, that the dawn of this new century has awakened us to the great significance and promise of our relationship for our mutual benefit and for the benefit of the region and the world.

There are many factors which are driving us closer together. Our two societies are governed by democratic institutions for whom tending to the aspirations of their peoples is paramount. Shared value systems and interests provide a strong underpinning to our bilateral ties. I would even say that the comfort level between India and Japan is the highest among Asian countries, which we believe is an excellent foundation for developing our relationship further. So, it is not surprising for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to say that India-Japan relations have the greatest potential of all and must be nurtured to become the most important bilateral relationship in the world. And when my Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh fully reciprocates the sentiment, this becomes not just a shared aspiration but a decision based on a very careful consideration of how Asia and the world are changing and what role India and Japan must together play in this process.

What is the 21st century going to be like? In a fast changing world undergoing major transformations, predictions are difficult but we may be in a position to discern the evolving trends. There is no doubt that the centre of gravity of the global economy is shifting towards Asia, where several new economic powers are emerging at the same time, from China to South Korea, India to ASEAN. A resumption of economic and cultural contacts which had been impaired by centuries of colonial rule is taking place, leading in a sense to a rediscovery by Asia of itself. The logic of economic interde-

pendence has softened the legacy of past conflicts, and none have occurred in Asia for almost three decades.

And yet, major challenges remain. Asia is yet to construct adequate regional structures which reflect and accommodate current day geopolitical power equations. To underpin shared prosperity and growth, it is essential to engage the wider Asian region within a cooperative framework that mitigates the edges of competition unleashed by the forces of globalisation. In fact, Asia faces a daunting integration challenge which will require to be met with responsible leadership.

I am convinced that no two countries are better placed to work together to define the contours of this new emerging Asia than India and Japan.

In the context of our shared democratic values, the stable polity and economic dynamism of India must surely carry a special significance for Japan and the rest of Asia. It is truly remarkable that more than a billion people in India are seeking socio-economic progress within the framework of a functioning democracy, a free market economy and an open society committed to fundamental human rights and respect for the rule of law. We have achieved over 9% rates of growth in recent years but do not see this growth in isolation from our democratic values. The manner in which we develop has to remain in consonance with these values.

We are particularly mindful of ensuring that the pursuit of growth does not strain our social and cultural fabric beyond the limits of tolerance. This is all the more so as we are a nation of immense diversity. I believe that the great achievement of India has been that through the difficult processes of socio-economic transformation, it has remained steadfast in its pursuit of open and democratic practices. Democracy, far from imposing restrictions on growth, has actually been a key contributing factor to stable growth and social progress as it has provided healthy governance and strong institutions to our developing society.

India stands out as a successful example of the democratic organisation of a vast and diverse developing country. It is, in this context, a beacon of hope for mankind and the world.

An equally remarkable phenomenon has been Japan's rise from the devastation of World War II to become the world's second largest economy and Asia's most technologically empowered nation, which we in India greatly applaud.

Today, we stand shoulder to shoulder in the pursuit of securing for Asia an unprecedented era of progress, freedom and prosperity.

India's geographical location has historically made it the crossroads linking Central Asia, West Asia and Southeast Asia. We share one of the longest land borders in the world with China and land as well as maritime borders with three members of ASEAN. India's EEZ covers waters from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca. These geopolitical realities, together with our pursuit of enhanced regional cooperation with ASEAN, are another important determining factor for India-Japan cooperation in East Asian Community building.

We strongly believe that the key to ensuring long-term security and a stable equilibrium in Asia lies in the collective ability of Asian countries to build trust and confidence based on economic integration. It is with this conviction in mind that we espouse a vision of an Asian Economic Community of peace and shared prosperity in

which people, goods, services, investments and ideas can travel with ease across national borders. Studies have shown that a Pan-Asian Free Trade Area or EPA can open up new growth avenues for regional economies. This will by no means be easy, but India is ready to partner other likeminded countries like Japan to make this happen. The second East Asian Summit held earlier this year has laid the foundations for a cooperative regional architecture in Asia. We will work closely with Japan towards the progressive realisation of an Asian Economic Community.

Asia needs balanced and well developed security structures to provide an inclusive ambience for stability in the region on a long term basis, enabling nations to freely and confidently pursue their individual and common goals for economic development. Enhancing bilateral relations between India and Japan in the areas of defence and security can contribute to such a structure. I am particularly happy to note that the first Joint Goodwill Exercise between the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force and the Indian Navy was held last month. It is essential for India and Japan to significantly increase their maritime cooperation through interactions between their Navies and Coast Guards. The safety and security of sea lines of communication, combating piracy and terrorism, search and rescue, and disaster relief are all important areas in which India and Japan must work more closely together. Capacity building and joint training for UN Peace Keeping Operations is another area that requires our common attention.

India and Japan have a long history of contributing to multilateral institutions, in particular the United Nations. We are equally committed to the comprehensive reform of the UN, including the Security Council, to ensure that the concerns and the aspirations of the majority of the UN membership are adequately reflected and international cooperation becomes an effective tool for addressing global challenges. India and Japan must continue to work together with their other G-4 partners, Brazil and Germany, to overcome resistance to change and achieve their common objective of securing permanent membership of the Security Council. Recent interactions among G-4 countries have reinforced our conviction that the principled yet flexible approach of the G-4 commands widespread support and can be the basis for decision making at the UN General Assembly.

That brings me to perhaps the most important factor in our relationship for the present and the future, which is the great and unfulfilled potential of India-Japan Economic partnership. Indeed, the logic for closer economic relations between us is more compelling today than ever before. A demographically youthful and economically vibrant India is on a robust growth path. We must take full advantage of the complementarities between our economies to bring about faster development and growth in India and continued prosperity in Japan. Your partnership for the financial and technological empowerment of India's vast and highly skilled work force, together with India's large and growing market, provide ample opportunities which are yet to be tapped. Synergies between our two economies can propel economic growth in Asia and beyond and become the growth engine of the century.

I welcome the momentum which has been generated in recent years to move ahead with the agenda of bilateral economic cooperation. The decision of the two Prime Ministers in December, 2006 to launch negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic

Partnership Agreement underlines their intention to raise the status of economic engagement to a qualitatively new level. CEPA negotiations have already commenced earlier this year, and both sides are committed to their earliest possible conclusion.

A notable and defining characteristic, not unlike Japan's own experience in the 60s and 70s, of India's economic growth is that it has been financed largely by its own resources, driven in large measure by increasing domestic demand and led mainly by Indian entrepreneurship and globally competitive Indian enterprises. Another area of India's strength is that we are a knowledge driven society with a high capacity in the frontier areas of technology and innovation. We would like Japan to take advantage of our vast pool of scientific talent and look at India as a hub for cutting edge R&D in knowledge intensive areas such as IT, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. More than 100 MNCs already are and there is every reason for Japanese companies to also do so.

If India is to sustain its current high-levels of growth over the next two to three decades, it must meet the challenges of energy and environmental sustainability. Today, more than half of India's energy requirements are met by coal and most of its energy supplies are derived from fossil fuels. If India is to significantly increase its energy output and address environmental concerns at the same time, it has no alternative but to further develop its nuclear energy sources. We already have a longstanding nuclear power programme but with access to international cooperation in this field, we will be able to develop nuclear power even faster.

There is much India can gain from Japan's experience and technology in the field of energy. We have initiated an India-Japan Energy Dialogue to comprehensively address the challenges of energy security, energy efficiency, energy conservation, clean energy and environmentally friendly alternative sources of energy.

Allow me to address an area of public concern in Japan, as the only country to have been a victim of nuclear weapons. India not only has an impeccable record on non-proliferation, but has also consistently been a leading proponent of the elimination of all nuclear weapons. We did not join the NPT because it is a discriminatory treaty and does little to advance the objective of ridding the world of nuclear weapons. Let me assure you that India is aware of Japan's sensitivities related to Nuclear Non-Proliferation and is more than willing to join hands with Japan to achieve universal nuclear disarmament.

Based on their shared belief that India-Japan relations must be developed comprehensively and with a long-term vision, our leaders have agreed to pursue a Strategic and Global Partnership aimed not only for mutual benefit but also for peace, prosperity, security and stability of the region and beyond. Today, India and Japan are looking to expand their commonalities through increased interaction in bilateral, regional and multilateral fora. We are committed to harnessing our respective economic and technological strengths for mutual benefit. The success of our common endeavours to address geopolitical, strategic and economic challenges in a rapidly changing world will set the course for the Asian continent in this century and have a far reaching and positive impact in the rest of the world.

I would like to conclude by saying that in India, Japan has a constant and reliable

friend for all seasons, a factor of confidence and strength, as we together face future challenges in this Asian century.

Thank you.